



Totem Lake

2nd Symposium

Summary

On October 26, 2012, the City of Kirkland hosted a gathering of approximately 70 people at the **Second Totem Lake Symposium**, to provide an update on the Totem Lake Business District. The revitalization of the Totem Lake Business District has been the focus of City efforts since September, 2010, when a similar symposium was convened to consider what actions the City might initiate to make Totem Lake more attractive to reinvestment.

At the gathering, the City provided background on the history of City involvement in Totem Lake including a decade ago, the designation of Totem Lake as an Urban Center and new zoning to accommodate the largest amount of residential and employment density in the city, and the provision of transit infrastructure to serve this density. Despite these efforts, Totem Lake had not lived up to expectations, and in 2010, City Council asked staff to revisit Totem Lake and determine what strategies might be employed to improve it.

In September, 2010, the City held a symposium and invited major stakeholders including property owners, businesses, and outside real estate and finance experts to discuss what might make Totem Lake more competitive. Following up on that meeting, the City Council approved a work plan for 2010-12 based upon responses of symposium attendees. The City also invited the Urban Land Institute to analyze whether current zoning and work plan items were the right direction to focus efforts. The ULI concluded the city was on target but must wait out the recession before it sees major development, but could set the table for reinvestment by making improvements to the regulatory environment and to the infrastructure of Totem Lake.

At the recent **Second Totem Lake Symposium** the City reported on the following accomplishments since 2010:

- Over 100 net new businesses have located in Totem Lake
- Infrastructure improvements have been made to mitigate flood events (\$4.5 M)
- A planned 120th connector is in design and will improve circulation (\$7.4 M)
- New zoning flexibility including increased height in certain zones, allowance for first floor uses in addition to retail, specific decoupling of development with infrastructure fees and requirements have removed regulatory barriers to redevelopment
- New City investments including the \$30 million Public Safety Building and Off leash Dog Park provide a 'sense of place'
- Work has begun on a Totem Lake Master Plan to analyze taking ownership of Totem Lake, creating a park district incorporating it, and suggesting new programs for activating and connecting the lake and immediate area.
- City purchase of the Cross Kirkland Corridor (abandoned BNSF ROW) for \$5 million and preparation for the first phase of development for bike/pedestrian use.

Bob Malte, CEO of Evergreen Health, spoke about private investment in Totem Lake that has taken place since 2010. Key projects include:

- 116 Slater is a mixed use residential development project under construction with 108 apartments and 10,000 square feet of retail space.
- Imagine Housing's St. Francis, an affordable housing project, provided 60 new apartment units.
- Astronics and other aerospace businesses have moved to Totem Lake from nearby cities fostering hundreds of new Totem Lake jobs. Astronics alone will bring 300 jobs to the district.
- A new \$35 million, 83,000 square foot Allied Health Building at Lake Washington Institute of Technology has been built.
- Michael O'Brien announced the expansion of Toyota with \$20 million state-of-the-art new construction and the opening of a new Volkswagen dealership in Totem Lake with projected revenue of \$60 million and 100 new jobs.

There also was a report out by the Founders Club, a subset of the Kirkland Business Roundtable, who described efforts to get property owners and businesses who border the Cross Kirkland Corridor to advocate for corridor funding and other measures. And, a class from Northwest University described their efforts to think of new uses for ground floor spaces in Totem Lake.

A pulse pad (polling) exercise asked participants to vote on what they thought of the current Totem Lake work plan and also, what steps they would like to see the City take in the near future to continue the revitalization. A panel of experts in urban design, housing, planning and financing also weighed in on what next for Totem Lake. The general consensus was that there was some improvement to conditions in Totem Lake but more needed to be done. In addition:

- Both the panel and 62% of the audience felt that it would be appropriate for zoning regulations to allow taller buildings in those locations where higher density is desired.
- There was strong support for high density housing (55% of participants) coupled with amenities (69% of participants) to jump start place making in Totem Lake.
 - Lack of amenities was voted the leading deterrent to redevelopment in Totem Lake
- Transportation improvements should be made to accommodate additional density (the response of 41% of participants).
- Audience members expressed their views about the current development climate in Totem Lake including possible threats to manufacturing uses, lack of retail, and lack of market demand. Forty percent felt the latter was the issue holding Totem Lake back.

With the planned revisiting of the Totem Lake Business District and City-wide Comprehensive Plan policies in 2013-14 including scrutiny of land use and transportation, the above issues and others will be analyzed and some prospective strategies for revitalization put before the community for consideration. The community can stay involved by visiting the City's [Totem Lake webpage](#) or contacting Ellen Miller-Wolfe, Economic Development Manager at emwolfe@kirklandwa.gov or (425) 587-3014.